# NOTES ON THE BOWER-BIRDS (*FAM. SCENOPIDÆ*) OF AUSTRALIA.

By A. J. North.

This beautiful and interesting section of the *Paradiseidæ* claims special attention at the hands of Australian Naturalists. The nidification and eggs of five species are now known, but these descriptions being distributed over various publications, I thought perhaps a few notes I have put together on the subject, would be of interest to some of my fellow-workers in Australian Oology. Having had access to the Dobroyde and other collections, I am enabled to give descriptions of thoroughly authentic specimens.

## Ptilonorhynchus violaceus, *Vieill.*

The range of this species extends over the whole of the east and south coasts of Australia, from Rockingham Bay in the north to the Port Phillip and Otway districts in the south. The favourite localities or parts where this species is most plentiful, are the scrubs or thickets of the mountain ranges, where wild fruits abound; but it also visits the gardens of the settlers and feeds on almost any kind of fruit.

In 1878 I first met with them breeding in the ranges of South Gippsland, particularly on the Strzelecki, and in the neighbourhood of the Tarwin River, where I obtained both nests and bowers. The first nest I found was built in a musk tree (*Olearia argophylla*) about six feet from the ground, and resembled that of *Cracticus destructor*. The eggs are usually two in number for a sitting.

Eggs in my own collection from Gippsland vary slightly from those in the Dobroyde collection from the Illawarra district, being more swollen and heavily marked. The latter were described in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, amongst those of other birds. (P. Z. S., 1875, p. 112).

The Gippsland specimens appear much stronger in the texture of the shell than any of the New South Wales examples I have met with, and are of a rich cream colour, with irregular dashes and markings of a dark umber, some of them being superimposed, and a few are of a pale lilac tint; the remainder of the surface is thickly covered with minute dots and freckles of light brown, together with several hair lines of the same colour, particularly towards the larger end. Length, 1·71 inch × 1·1 inch.

### Ailurœdus crassirostris, *Payk.*

A. Smithii, *Vig. & Horsf.*; *Gould*, *Handbook*, Vol. I. p. 446.

*Hab.*—East coast of Australia, extending from Moreton Bay in the north, to Cape Howe in the south. This species is common on all the ranges near the coast in New South Wales, but up to the present the nest is known only from one taken by Mr. Ralph Hargrave at Stanwell, near Wollongong, in the Illawarra District.

Both nest and eggs were described by Dr. Ramsay in the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales, 1878, Vol. II. p. 107.

To-day I had the pleasure of examining this set of eggs, and the most striking characteristic about them is their unusually small dimensions, for the size of the bird.

Although approaching closely to *P. violaceus* in its habits, neither this nor the following species is as yet known to make a bower.

### Ailurœdus maculosus, *Ramsay.*

This is a smaller species than the preceding, and, as far as is known at present, is confined to the coast ranges between the

Herbert River and Cooktown. In the vicinity of Rockingham Bay it is not rare, but nothing is at present recorded of its economy or nidification. In habits it is stated to closely resemble the New South Wales species.

### Chlamydodera nuchalis, *Jard. & Selb.*

This is the largest representative of this genus, and is found in Northern and North Western Australia. A fine specimen of the elegantly formed bower, together with the birds, may be seen in the National Museum of Melbourne. Its nest and eggs are still desiderata, but when found will undoubtedly approach those of *C. maculata*. It is strange that neither of the large collections made recently by Mr. Cairns and Mr. Boyer-Bower in North Western Australia, contain any representatives of the genus (1).

### Chlamydodera orientalis, *Gould.*

Chlamydodera nuchalis, *Ramsay (nec. Jard. & Selb.)* Ibis, 1865, p. 85.

The first recorded specimens of this species were obtained about twenty miles inland from Port Denison, and were distributed among Museums under the name of *C. nuchalis*. (See Ibis, 1865, p. 85).

This is the eastern representative of *C. nuchalis*, from which it differs very slightly.

Nothing is recorded of its nidification.

### Chlamydodera maculata, *Gould.*

Our knowledge of the range of this species has recently been extended to Cape York; previously Rockingham Bay was considered its northern limit on the coast, and the Murray district in

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(1) Since this was in print, Mr. Boyer-Bower's last consignment has come to hand, and contains two specimens, both females.—E.P.R.

Victoria and South Australia, its most southern range. The interior provinces are the stronghold of this species, where it is found plentifully dispersed all over the Lachlan and Darling River districts. It occurs inland about 80 miles west from Rockhampton on the Dawson River, and is also reported by Mr. Kendal Broadbent from Charleville, a new settlement about 125 miles west of Brisbane.

The nest is an open structure placed in a low tree, and is saucer- or bowl-shaped, composed of sticks, and lined with grass and feathers.

It is very rarely indeed that *C. maculata* is found near the coast, although on one occasion Dr. Ramsay procured an egg on Ash Island, near Hexham, on the Hunter River, about 10 miles from the sea coast. This was in 1861, and probably the first time that the egg had been found, although this fact appears to have escaped the Doctor's memory, since he described another egg of the same species 13 years afterwards (*P. Z. S.*, 1874, p. 605), when Mr. J. B. White was credited with having obtained the first specimen.

I give Dr. Ramsay's description, which is that of the typical egg, and of the most usual variety found.

"In form elongate, tapering; shell thin and delicate, somewhat shining and smooth. Ground-colour of a delicate greenish-white tint, surrounded with narrow, wavy, twisted, irregular, thread-like lines of brown, dark umber, light umber-brown, and a few blackish brown, which cross and recross each other, forming an irregular network round the centre and thicker end; towards the thinner end they are not so closely interwoven, and light brown lines appear as if beneath the surface of the shell, also a few black irregular shaped linear markings, much broader than the rest,

show conspicuously against the pale greenish-white ground; and here and there, over the whole surface, are scattered ill-shapen figures resembling twos, threes, and fives (2, 3, 5) of various tints of colour. Length, 1·5 inch; breadth, 1 inch."

In 1875, Mr. James Ramsay obtained several specimens of both birds and eggs at Tyndarie; and others were received from the Clarence River District. Since then the eggs have become less rare, and are to be found in most collections formed in the interior. The eggs of *C. maculata* vary considerably in the extent of their markings, and sometimes in the tints of colouring; one I have from the Dawson River District is slightly smaller than usual, and has the ground-colour a faint greenish-grey covered *all over* with a fine network of light brownish linear markings closer together near the thicker end; others have their markings confined altogether to the larger end of the egg.

The bower is a beautiful arched structure of twigs and grass, placed on end on the ground, and secured by a platform of sticks, which, as well as the inside, is highly decorated with shells and bleached bones of birds and small animals, &c. This latter propensity has gained for this species in some parts of the interior the name of the "Sepulchre Bird"; in other parts it is known as the "Pink Pole".

### Chlamydodera guttata, *Gould.*

As far as I know I have never yet seen this somewhat doubtful species, but Dr. Ramsay, while recently in London, availed himself of the opportunity of examining the type, and after comparing his notes with a large series received from all parts of Australia, he does not consider the slight differences exhibited in *C. guttata*, sufficient to warrant its being separated from *C. maculata*. It

will be necessary therefore to receive a complete series from North Western Australia, where the type was obtained, before their points of distinction can be finally determined.

### Chlamydodera cerviniventris, *Gould.*

This species is found at Cape York, the Islands of Torres Straits, and in the southern portions of New Guinea. This is the only known species of the genus that has not the handsome rose-coloured frill on the nape of the neck. Its bower is larger than that of any of the foregoing, and has the sides nearly parallel with one another, with a very slight curvature at the top. It is not so highly ornamented as the bowers of other members of this genus.

The nest is an open one, cup-shaped, and built near the ground; it is composed of twigs, pieces of bark, and moss, and is lined inside with grass, &c. The egg is very like that of *C. maculata*, with the same peculiar linear markings crossing and recrossing each other all round; it is slightly larger and in form more swollen. Dr. Ramsay informs me that an egg of this species said to have been taken by one of Mr. Goldie's party while exploring in New Guinea, found its way to London, where it was sold at a great price as that of *Paradisea raggiana*, which it in no way resembles.

### Sericulus melinus, *Lath.*

Plate XIX., fig. 4.

This, perhaps, the most beautiful of all the Bower-builders, and one of the earliest known species, was described by Latham in 1801, under the name of *Turdus melinus;* since that date, however, it has been redescribed many times and under various

names, of which that given to it by Swainson, *S. chrysocephalus* appears the most appropriate, if not the oldest. Dr. Ramsay discovered the bower of this species in 1860, on Ash Island, and the nest in 1875 in the dense scrubs of the Richmond River district.

The nest was an open one resembling that of a *Collyriocincla* in size and structure; it was built in a cluster of "lawyer vines," *Calamus australis.*

The bower is a poor one compared with those of the *Chlamydoderæ*, but otherwise is not unlike that of *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, though smaller and more loosely put together.

The egg is a long oval, slightly swollen at one end, the ground-colour being of a pale lavender; upon the larger end and beneath the surface of the shell is a zone of nearly round and oval-shaped spots of a uniform pale lilac colour, which in some places are confluent; on the outer surface all over the larger end, to the lower edge of the zone, are irregularly shaped, but well-defined linear markings of sienna, assuming strange shapes; two prominent markings being a double loop, and a scroll, others less conspicuous are in the shape of the letter Z and the figure 6, while several of the markings stand at right angles to one another; from the lower edge of the zone and dispersed over the rest of the surface, are a few bold dashes of the same colour, several lines being straight, but marked obliquely across the egg, others are like the letter V with one side lengthened at a right angle, and the figure 7, while upon the lower apex is a single mark in the shape of the letter M. The pecularity of the markings of this egg are, that the spots appear to be on the *under* surface, and the linear markings on the *outer* surface of the shell.

Length 1·35 inch × ·09 in breadth.

### Scenopœus dentirostris, *Ramsay*.

This remarkable bird is quite unlike any other genus of the family, and is found only in the dense brushes of the Bellenden Ker Range, situated on the North-east Coast of Queensland; its range does not extend further north than the scrubs near Cooktown, nor has it been found further south than the Herbert River. As far as at present known this species does not build a bower, but in lieu thereof clears a space in the scrub about 10 feet in diameter, and ornaments it with little heaps of bright berries, and gaily coloured leaves and flowers &c. An interesting account of the habits of this species will be found in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, 1875, p. 591. Nothing is known of its nidification at present.